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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

pursuant to Rule 103 of the Rules of Procedure

by Robert Sturdy and Maria Martens, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group

by Gianluca Susta, Johan Van Hecke, Thierry Cornillet and Danutė Budreikaitė, on behalf of the ALDE Group

by Cristiana Muscardini and Ryszard Czarnecki, on behalf of the UEN Group

on Economic Partnerships Agreements

European Parliament resolution on Economic Partnerships Agreements

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States of the other part, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 (the Cotonou Agreement),
 - having regard to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly resolutions adopted on 23 November 2006 in Barbados and on 20 November 2007 in Kigali on the review of negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs),
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 980/2005 of 27 June 2005 applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences,
 - having regard to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), in particular Article XXIV thereof,
 - having regard to the Ministerial Declaration of the Sixth Session of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference, adopted on 18 December 2005 in Hong Kong,
 - having regard to the recent policy statement of 9 November 2007 by the Ministers of the ACP countries on EPAs,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on this matter, and in particular its resolution of 23 May 2007,
 - having regard to its report on Economic Partnership Agreements (2005/2246(INI)),
 - having regard to Rule 103 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the EU's existing Cotonou trade agreement with the ACP countries, which gives the latter preferential access to EU markets on a reciprocal basis, does not comply with the rules of the WTO,
- B. whereas the Cotonou Agreement sets out the parties' agreement to conclude new WTO-compatible trading arrangements, progressively removing barriers to trade between them and enhancing cooperation in all areas relevant to trade and development,
- C. whereas the waiver exempting this agreement from WTO law will expire at the end of 2007, requiring both parties to put in place a WTO-compatible alternative,
- D. whereas negotiations on EPAs, to replace the Cotonou Agreement, are not progressing at the same pace in the six regions and are not likely to be completed before the end of 2007,

- E. whereas several ACP countries are very reluctant to conclude EPAs and others insist on the importance to their economy of EU market access,
- F. whereas there is global and serious concern at the possible consequences of a legal vacuum, after expiry of the 31 December 2007 deadline, for the trade relationship between the European Union and ACP countries,
- G. whereas in October 2007 the European Commission made an offer to the ACP countries for an interim agreement, as a first phase of EPAs covering only trade in goods, to be implemented as from 31 December 2007,
1. Reiterates its belief that EPAs, designed to be development instruments, represent an opportunity to promote sustainable development, regional integration and reduction of poverty in the ACP countries;
 2. Expresses, however, its deep concern at the slow pace of the negotiations, as a result of which, most probably, no full agreements will be signed with any of the ACP regional groups by 31 December 2007;
 3. Calls on the Commission and the ACP countries to explore transitional measures which could eliminate the risk of a vacuum in the EU-ACP relationship after 31 December 2007, in order to avoid legal uncertainty surrounding the EU-ACP relationship, which would have disastrous consequences for non-LDC ACP countries;
 4. Takes note with interest of the proposal made by the Commission on 23 October 2007 and the decision of the General Affairs and External Affairs Council of 17 November 2007 to conclude, in the first phase of negotiations, interim agreements limited to trade in goods;
 5. Underlines the importance of ongoing ACP regional integration processes; acknowledges this 'two-step' approach as proposed by the European Commission as no more than a temporary and pragmatic arrangement, in order not to interrupt the flow of goods with tariff advantages to the EU beyond 1 January 2008;
 6. Calls on both parties to shoulder their responsibility to continue negotiations on the other issues after this deadline as a matter of urgency, keeping especially in mind that non-LDC ACP countries would lose preferential access to EU markets; stresses that a long-term agreement can only be reached if all parties concerned feel committed to it;
 7. Recognises that it is important for the ACP countries to commit themselves to the economic partnership process and to promote the reforms needed to bring social and economic structures into line with the agreements; urges ACP governments to implement good governance rules; urges the Commission to adhere to the principles of full asymmetry and flexibility;
 8. Emphasises that establishing a genuine regional market represents an essential basis for successfully implementing EPAs and that regional integration is essential for the social and economic development of the ACP countries;
 9. Reaffirms that EPAs should be fully WTO-compatible;

10. Stresses that the Commission's offer on rules of origin marks a relaxation of current provisions; believes that the necessary flexibility should be built into the agreement, taking into account the differences in level of industrial development between the EU and the ACP countries as well as among ACP countries;
11. Notes the importance of creating appropriate conditions to stimulate investment, trade in services and rules on competition in EPAs, this being conducive to economic growth; acknowledges the reluctance of some ACP regional groups with regard to these issues, which needs to be taken into account by the Commission;
12. Calls on the Commission to carry out a systematic analysis, during the negotiations and following their conclusion, of the social impact of EPAs on the groups most at risk;
13. Stresses that trade rules must be accompanied by an increase in support for trade-related assistance; calls for concrete commitments to be made prior to the conclusion of EPA negotiations, addressing both trade-related assistance and the adjustment costs associated with EPAs;
14. Requests the Commission and the Council to consult the European Parliament on the conclusion of EPA interim agreements pursuant to Article 300(3), second paragraph, of the Treaty establishing the European Community;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the ACP-EU Council and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.